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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HARARE 000648

SIPDIS

NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR J. FRAZER
LONDON FOR C. GURNEY
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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [ASEC](#) [ZI](#)
SUBJECT: MDC WINS HIGHFIELD AND KUWADZANA

REF: HARARE 636

Classified By: Political Officer Audu Besmer for reasons 1.5 b/d

Summary:

1. (C) The opposition MDC won by-elections in the Harare high-density suburbs of Highfield and Kuwadzana by significant margins, despite an electoral process tilted heavily in favor of ZANU-PF. The March 29-30 voting process itself was peaceful and orderly, if at times slow. The environment in the vicinity of many polling stations, however, was very tense as roving bands of ZANU-PF youths and supporters threatened and harassed voters and diplomatic observers. We would expect the GOZ to claim victory a Pyrrhic in that it increased the percentage of its urban support, and to respond with a violent crackdown on MDC supporters in the two constituencies. End Summary.

2. (C) According to state radio, MDC officials and the Director of the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN), a coalition of NGOs interested in maintaining the integrity of elections, the MDC won Highfield with 8,759 votes, against only 4,844 for ZANU-PF. In Kuwadzana, the MDC received 12,548 votes to ZANU-PF's 5,002. These numbers represent a fifty percent increase in votes cast for ZANU-PF in Highfield, and a eleven percent increase in votes cast for ZANU-PF in Kuwadzana since the 2000 parliamentary elections. In contrast, these numbers represent a forty percent decrease in votes cast for the MDC in Highfield, and a twenty percent decrease in votes cast for the MDC in Kuwadzana as compared to the 2000 parliamentary elections. The MDC's victories were announced on government-controlled radio broadcasts late in the day on March 31.

Diplomatic Access to Polling Stations Problematic

3. (C) Six Embassies along with about twenty diplomats from other Western and African countries observed voting in by-elections in the Harare high-density suburbs of Kuwadzana and Highfield March 29-30. Even though interested foreign missions in Harare had received and were carrying letters from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs indicating that accreditation for diplomats was not necessary, some polling station officials denied some diplomats access on March 29. The government-appointed Electoral Supervisory Commission issued a letter to polling station presiding officers by March 30 and diplomats then gained full access. Embassies observed that voting proceeded peacefully and in good order, if at times slowly. Embassies observed lines of 100-350 prospective voters at most of the nineteen polling stations on March 29, but, consistent with expectations, lines of only 10-20 voters on March 30. The historical pattern in Zimbabwean elections is that most people vote on the first day. By the afternoon of March 30 a few polling stations had logged about 1600 total votes each. Embassies observed and party polling agents confirmed less than ten percent of prospective voters were turned away.

Violence

4. (C) There were more incidents of violence than is typical on the voting days, which historically have been peaceful. According to a representative of the prominent human rights organization, the Amani Trust, the Avenues Medical Clinic treated ten people on March 30 for beating wounds reportedly inflicted by ruling party supporters in Kuwadzana and Highfield. In one case, ZANU-PF youths beat an MDC member assigned to bring food to MDC polling agents, who by law cannot leave their polling stations. The MDC member suffered a large head wound and bruises over his entire body when Poloff saw him at the Avenues Medical Clinic on March 30. According to another MDC member assigned with the victim to deliver food, ZANU-PF supporters chased the MDC members, including a Highfield MDC polling agent. They drove to the Highfield police station seeking protection but police were unresponsive. Later, the youths blocked the car in which the MDC members were traveling. Others escaped on foot, but the

youths beat the victim severely.

15. (C) On March 29 in Highfield, Emboff observed ZANU-PF youths beating one man while other ZANU-PF youths were handing out bread from the back of a flatbed truck.

16. (C) ZESN reported that on March 30 ZANU-PF supporters abducted two of their independent observers from polling stations in Kuwadzana and beat them severely. Another was beaten at a polling station in Highfield.

Intimidation

17. (C) Emboffs observed ZANU-PF youths, possibly National Youth Service members in plain clothes, roving around polling stations in the two constituencies on foot and in large flat bed trucks and small pickups. These youths threatened voters and Emboffs verbally at the entrances to many polling stations, and Emboffs observed large numbers of voters leaving voting lines without having voted. Riot police were heavily deployed in both constituencies in large military-style vehicles, but they did little to control illegal campaigning by ZANU-PF youths.

18. (C) On March 29, at a supermarket shopping plaza near a Kuwadzana polling station ZANU-PF supporters were drumming and chanting "don't vote, go home or we will attack you" while, ironically, holding a campaign banner for the ZANU-PF candidate--in clear violation of Zimbabwe's electoral laws. The Deputy South African High Commissioner attempted to reason with the mob, but they surrounded him and shouted at him to "go back to South Africa."

19. (C) In an encounter on March 29 in Highfield, the ZANU-PF candidate, Joseph Chinotimba accused Emboffs of being terrorists and said they had no right to be at the polling station.

Irregularities and Electoral Law Violations

10. (C) On March 29-30 diplomats saw Elliott Manyika, ZANU-PF's National Political Commissar and Cabinet Minister, visiting polling stations throughout both constituencies. On March 30 he addressed a ZANU-PF rally near the Kuwadzana District Office polling station --clearly illegal under Zimbabwean election law and certainly intimidating to MDC voters standing in line--encouraging support for the ruling party.

11. (C) On March 29 and 30 diplomats saw a police officer in one case, and ZANU-PF officials in other cases, checking names off some sort of registry as people approached and "checked in" at tables set up near polling stations in Highfield. The registrants were then ferried to nearby polling stations in pickup trucks to vote. The diplomats questioned the officials involved and confirmed that they were members of ZANU-PF. The officials warned the diplomats to leave. We presume that the registry was for ruling party voters who had cast ballots for the ZANU-PF candidate or intended to do so, and would comprise the beneficiary list for rewards such as scarce mealie meal.

12. (C) At one polling station in Highfield on March 29, Emboffs observed ZANU-PF youths entering and exiting without the required official identification badges. The MDC polling agent there reported that they had harassed him and had broken his vehicle windshield while the polling agent was inside the polling station.

Comment:

13. (C) ZANU-PF employed its usual tactics of violence and intimidation and flaunted electoral and other laws willy nilly in the process. The significant decrease in the number of votes cast for the MDC, in the face of widespread popular dissatisfaction with this regime, is a testament to the effectiveness of the GOZ intimidation machine. Having been thrashed at the polls, we still expect the GOZ to claim victories in having increased its share of the votes cast in both constituencies. And while 200 people spontaneously celebrated on the street in front of MDC's headquarters in downtown Harare when the results were announced on March 31, we would expect this jovial mood to give way very shortly to fear in the face of government retribution against MDC supporters in these two steadfast opposition constituencies.

14. (C) Comment continued. Cheating in an urban environment is more difficult, but how ZANU-PF let these elections slip away remains unanswered. It is possible / probable that some phantom ballots were cast for ZANU-PF, but clearly not enough. Prior to the elections, the MDC claimed voter roll rigging of 11,000 in Highfield and 8,000 in Kuwadzana, nearly equal to the total votes the MDC received. ZANU-PF clearly

did not pull out all the stops, and as a result the magic number of parliamentary seats they must obtain to reach the absolute two-thirds majority they seek remains at this time, still tantalizingly out of reach. End Comment.

SULLIVAN